

Through Suffering to Happiness



by Father Victor van Tricht, S.J.

Preface

My God!

I write these pages in Thy presence, with the thought of helping the souls that suffer.

To them Thou didst speak, saying: "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

Give me, O my God, the grace to lead to Thee at least some of the most unhappy.

If, by chance, in their silken boudoirs, some lovers of the comfortable, some of those worldlings who try to reach happiness through pleasure, happen to read the title of this book, they wittily will smile, being aware indeed that therein is quite a foolish theory, and that such a Middle Ages mysticism is nowadays out of place as well as out of time.

"Thy saying is hard and who can hear it?" they will say as the disciples of old, when the Saviour uttered the words of truth: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" or when He made the eight Beatitudes spring forth from the eight sorrows of life.

But it does not matter what *blasé* worldlings will say. The Word of God is eternally true, and the road of the cross, all the while mankind will continue rolling onward, shall remain the true way toward happiness: *per crucem ad lucem*.

As said the poets:

"A finer peace shall be wrought out of pain,
Than the stars in their courses know.
Ah me! but my soul is in sorrow till then
And the feet of the years move slow."

Let us, therefore, study how to acquire this Christian happiness, let

us see how "to abound with joy in all our tribulations."

- *Father Joseph Mary Lelen*
- *Troy, New York*
- *Exaltation of the Holy Cross*
- *1904*

Introduction

"A heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam from the day of their coming forth from their mother's womb until the day of their burial into the mother of all." Suffering is that yoke.

The infant on entering this world sheds tears: it is his greeting to life. The old man who is in the agonies of death, sheds slow, cold, silent tears: it is his farewell to life. Between those two events, how many tears have been shed! Who can measure the bitterness and the suffering gathered in the heart of a man who has lived a long life?

Nobody escapes that yoke. Since the fall in Eden, it is the lot of everyone coming into the world; it is the fatal and inalienable heritage of the sin of our first parents; it is our share of punishment in the expiation extending from the beginning of the human race throughout all ages until the death of its last member.

Philosophy, relying on its own unaided researches, in vain strives to discover the origin of the physical evil, called suffering. Faith, with its supernatural light, finds it written in the first pages of Holy Writ: "Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life." So while philosophy argues and faith reveals, mankind suffers.

In some the suffering is visible, and their pains arouse sympathy; no one envies their lot, for they are considered unhappy. Others pass before us with all the vain ostentation of happiness: their eyes are full of joy, their lips fall of smiles. We do not see beneath the mask, we believe them happy and envy their apparent good fortune. Could we, however, but behold them in their hours of solitude, how often should we not see them weeping bitter tears from a heart broken with anguish.

Still, there are others who are not a prey to such great afflictions; a more secret and less acute sensation undermines and consumes

them, the sensation of emptiness. They grow disgusted with the vanity of created things, for creatures can not fill the void they feel in their heart. Hence they feel weariness, "that intolerable weariness which is at the bottom of everything."

There is a saying in Holy Writ which puzzles me. It is uttered by two different men under very different circumstances. The one, reduced to complete wretchedness, to poverty after great wealth, upbraided by his wife and all his friends; he had suddenly been bereft of his sons and daughters. Seated on a dunghill, covered with disgusting sores, he scraped the corrupt matter from them with a potsherd. This was Job. The other, overflowing with every kind of happiness, rich, powerful, glorious, honored, learned above all, the wisest of men, enjoying all the pleasures of mind and body, is seated upon his throne in a magnificent palace, surrounded by a splendid court. This was Solomon.

I ask Job about life. He answers, "My soul is weary of my life." I ask Solomon the same question, and in almost the same words he answers, "I am weary of my life." Who is not mystified by so great contrasts giving an identical reply to being weary of life. Is it true, then, that life is burdensome to everyone?

Yes, life is burdensome to everyone.

But, it may be asked, if suffering is unavoidable in this world, has it no consolation, no remedy? If there is, it is not in itself that the human heart can find them, for, says holy Job, "My help is not in me." Indeed, we can shake off our sorrow; we can undertake an absorbing and difficult work; we can become so enraptured with pleasure as to forget our disease, for a weaker sensation may be drowned or obliterated by a more powerful one, but only for a time. When this one ceases or vanishes, we, as it were, suddenly wake up as from a dream, and again find suffering in all its painful reality. We had, for some moments, forgotten the sword piercing our heart, and now we feel it again; it is still there, cutting and sinking deeper and deeper. Can we entirely forget suffering? Were we to forget, a new sorrow would arise. Does not every day bring with it its own suffering, its own trials? How many minutes do we enjoy perfect calm?

What indeed can we find to relieve our sufferings? What remedy have we for death which deprives us of our loved ones? What for bodily diseases, for our failures, for the disgrace we draw upon ourselves, for weariness of life, for the insipidity and vanity of everything created?

All we can do is to strive to be strong, to be resolute and to keep up our courage. That is all; and yet how often do we not fail in our efforts?

Or, again, can our wounded heart receive comfort and remedy from our fellow-men?

I do not deny that we may seek and find human comfort. Too often have I tasted the sweetness and power of friendship to disown its goodness and efficacy. 'Tis so good when we suffer, to lean upon a friendly heart and to feel the warm presence of a friendly hand. But alas! alas! This help is vain, because it comes from man who is vain himself.

When the mothers in and around Bethlehem had seen their loved babes cruelly murdered in their very arms, they could not be comforted by their friends, for, as the evangelist says, "Rachel would not be comforted, because they are not." Could their sympathizing friends give them back the dead they were bewailing?

Who has not felt his utter helplessness in relieving the sorrow of a friend? Death comes to his home, ruin falls upon him and his family, and the fond hopes of his life are suddenly shattered. He suffers, his soul is full of anguish. You go to him with your heart overflowing with a lively sympathy, you would, if you could, give up your share of happiness to compensate his loss, and suddenly when you are near him, your tongue becomes mute, words fail you to express your heartfelt sympathy, your mind is bewildered, and with sorrowing look and a warm pressure of hands, you can say only: "My friend, my poor friend!"

Although there are many ways of expressing condolence, true friendship, true sympathy feels they are inadequate and impotent to relieve sorrow and suffering. Only those who do not heartily sympathize or do not understand sorrow, know then how to speak

like actors in a play. Of such comforters Job said: "I haven often heard such words as these: you are troublesome comforters."

How seldom do we understand the sorrow of a friend!

How seldom do our friends understand our sorrow!

They see the outward, the visible sign; they do not see the internal deep wound. And even when God sends us, to sooth our life, a true, devoted friend who understands and feels for us, how often does He not, after a time, take him away from us! - We lose our friends, we leave them, they die and we remain alone, surviving, as it were, the burial of our own heart. No, no, it is not from man we can expect comfort.

Is it from God?

In Holy Writ nothing charms me so much as the permanent solicitude of God for mankind. He uses the most tender comparisons. Sometimes He speaks "as a nurse that cherisheth her children;" sometimes "as the hen that gathereth her chickens under her wings again as the father of the prodigal son, moved with compassion and hastening to meet and receive him, falling upon his neck and kissing him; and very often as a mother: "As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you."

It looks as if He wished to use all the ingenuity of love in order to attract to Himself the many souls that suffer. He appears as if imploring and beseeching them to come to Him for consolation. And how very seldom we go to him!

Why?

Do we doubt His power to comfort us and to dry our tears? No; we are aware that our loving God possesses in Himself all goodness and happiness. How often, lifting up our souls to Him in prayer, have we said, "O my God, everything which is glorious, honorable, and lovely is in Thee, in an eminent degree, in a most perfect purity and inseparable from Thee. In Thee are all delights and raptures. Thou art the only true and perfect God; Thou art the only true Friend that stays with us when every other friend has forsaken us." This we

know and believe. We know and feel that God alone can comfort us, because He is the true and only source of happiness.

Still we do not go to Him. We go to men, we go to creatures, that are vain and impotent. What may be the reason of such inconsistency?

It is perhaps because our poor souls are so dominated by our bodies, that we are unable to catch any comfort except that which flatters the senses. We are, in some manner, so materialized, as to be almost unable to relish what is intellectual or spiritual. God, as it were, should show Himself to our corporal eyes, should touch our hands, and speak to our ears, in order to be seen, felt, and heard by us. Our faculties are spiritually so blunt, as not to feel and profit by the mysterious and tender workings of the divine goodness.

Being man's Sovereign and knowing his essence perfectly, God can move and comfort man in his body and senses; He can even infuse into our organism, into our nerves, and our bones a thrill of happiness, as He did to some saints. - Sometimes, too, He does this to us, to a certain extent; and it is then that we receive those delicious moments of serenity, for which we vainly seek around us an apparent and created cause. Still God very seldom acts thus visibly. Usually it is to our mind, our reason, or our faith that He speaks and communicates Himself. It is only an inward austere comfort He gives us, and because we are too fond of worldly enjoyment, we do not appreciate it, we disdain it as disagreeable and ineffectual. How foolish we are!

Yes, how foolish we are! However, God who knows of what clay we are made, has had pity on us: "He humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men and in habit found as a man."

Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, God become man, will therefore be the comforter of our sufferings, will be our friend, will open His heart to our hearts. In Christ Jesus all is mystery for our feeble and doubtful reason; but among the problems raised by His human incarnation, the one which has always attracted me strongly, is why He chose to live a life of sorrow and suffering, why He chose to be the "man of sorrows."

In order to teach men faith and duty, to recall to them the old forgotten law, to raise again fallen human nature, it was not necessary for Christ to undergo suffering. To pay our debt to the justice of God the Father, the smallest act of reparation from God the Son would have sufficed.

However, He drank the chalice of atonement to the last drop.

Why?

Why did He suffer?

I see only one answer: He suffered in order to teach us how to suffer.

Therefore, O ye who suffer and do not know how to suffer, go to Him. Listen to His silent teaching from the crib to Calvary; saturate your soul with it, engrave it on your memory, cherish it and carry it nearest to your heart. It will be your strength, your energy, your courage. Saint Augustine calls us "the children of Calvary." Yes, we are indeed the children of Calvary. 'Tis there Christ begot us to His grace, and it is there He will yet shed in our weak and helpless hearts a power of resignation, which will enable them to look, without fear or fainting, upon the long series of miseries, sometimes painful, which flow in a human life.

How did Christ effect this?

He did not change the sad state of His creatures, nor remove their sufferings; but He took them upon Himself. "He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows." He took up His cross and went to Golgotha. From that day suffering has become for man a glorious mark, a seal of Christian nobility.

Do not be sad if you suffer; you are called to the fellowship of His sufferings. With Him go to Calvary, ascend that rugged mountain; you will not take a step without finding the footprints of the Crucified. Not a tear of your eye, not a drop of your heart's blood will fall without being mingled with the tears and the blood of Christ. See that forehead, those hands, those feet, that torn bosom, those red eyes, that pierced heart. If your forehead is as His,

crowned with thorns, if your hands are as His, pierced, if your heart is as His, transfixed, rejoice, for you wear the marks of your king. "You are made conformable to His death."

But Christ has not only made suffering glorious, He has made it happy. "I am filled with comfort"; "I exceedingly abound with joy in all my tribulations."

Worldlings fail to understand this. They do not see how one can love suffering. According to them it is folly; and the world has always held this belief, so that Saint Paul could truly exclaim: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness."

It does not matter whether the world understands this or not. The fact is before us. At the foot of the cross a new race was born, a race which loves sorrow, which makes it the companion of its pilgrimage, which prefers it to pleasure. It prefers humility and contempt to glory, poverty and suffering to riches. That race has been perpetuated by a divine germination. Its growth continues in our day. Our voluptuous age still sees, as in the first centuries of the Church, penitents fond of suffering, because Christ has suffered; our independent and insubordinate age beholds men whose ambition it is to be obedient and contrite, because Christ annihilated Himself unto the death of the cross. Our age with its inordinate craving for wealth, sees many loving poverty, because Christ was poor. Who will deny this? And how is it then we do not recognize that Jesus Christ has put a charm into suffering, a charm of which perhaps some do not realize the attraction, but which others gather up and preserve.

You ask me the secret of this mysterious transformation. Here it is. It is love. Love which makes suffering for the Beloved sweet and dear, love risen from the fire of silent communications between the heart of the Divine Crucified and the poor mortal hearts that approach His cross.

Besides, let us not forget these comforting words of the apostle: "That of our tribulations which is at present light and momentary, worketh for us, exceedingly above measure, an eternal weight of glory." "As ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of

the consolation."

Ye who now suffer, shall reach soon those summits of life, whence the sight of the future inspires more sadness than hope. You shall have lost upon the way those enthusiastic illusions, those simple joys, those smiling dreams of the spring of life, for they shall all fade. The wind that blows upon your head is a chilling wind that strips the trees. You shall go down. Steep is the slope! - and then the end will come: its name is death. Ah! when life is so short, eternity so long, when death, at any moment, can cut our life's thread and lay us in the grave, believe me, sweet it is to think that the share of suffering we have to endure here below, is a fruitful seed of happiness, cast in the soil of eternity.

Christians enjoy true peace when they rest in the arms of their loving Redeemer.

Meditation 1 - Jesus is Sentenced to Death



Sold by one of His chosen disciples, bound by the Roman pretorians, dragged from one judge to another by the Jews thirsting for His blood, though they cannot lay any crime to His charge, Christ Jesus is at last led before Pilate. Here below the supreme hope of the innocent is in Justice; so in the case of Jesus there was reason to hope in the integrity of a Roman magistrate. Pilate interrogates Him - he does not find in Him any guilt, as he twice proclaimed; he should then have set Him free; but no! the mob demands the death of Christ, and the mob is there, hateful, cruel, howling in the vestibule of the Pretorium. Pilate, already weak and yielding, has an inspiration of barbarous commiseration: "I shall have Him scourged," he said within himself. "When they shall see Him bleeding, they shall have pity on Him." And Jesus was fearfully scourged by the Roman soldiers, but the mob showed no pity. He must die. To Pilate, who was exasperated at so stubborn a hatred against the Just One, the priests said: "Be careful, if thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar;" and Pilate, hearing these words, trembled and feared to lose his governorship, and delivered the Innocent One unto them to be crucified, saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man" and he washed his hands before the people. In the meantime Jesus was offering His hands to the soldiers who were to lead Him to execution.

The triumphant multitude now leap for joy, for they are about to

see Christ die; they are urging the soldiers to proceed with their work. How the Jews, and especially the Pharisees exult, for they will now get rid of the preacher! Jesus hears all. He hears the calumnies of His accusers, the cowardly answers of Pilate, the insults of the crowd and its joyous shouts, and He holds His peace. Five days before, this same crowd had proclaimed Him their king: "Hosannah to the Son of David!" He now in vain looks for His apostles, whom He loved, whom He called His brethren. Peter, the chief? trembling before a woman, had denied Him three times: "I swear I do not know this man," he had said. Judas, the traitor, had hung himself. The others, at the first alarm, had fled and sought a place of concealment. "He holds His peace." He still seeks in the crowd for the sick He had cured, the blind to whom He had given sight, the lame whom He made to walk, the centurion whose servant He had healed, the widow of Nairn whose son He had raised to life. . . . Not one of them was there! Yes, there is a centurion; but he is busy seeing that the cross is made heavy enough; there are some women; yes, but with their hair dishevelled they also are shouting: "Let Him be crucified, and let His blood fall upon our children." Thus, is there no one among this crowd, who will speak for Christ? No one who remembers His favors? No one to voice the words of which the hill still holds the echo: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the paps that gave Thee suck"? Ho, no one is there to befriend him. Jesus is alone, betrayed, sold, abandoned, alone in the hand of His executioners; "and He holds His peace."

My God, how can I venture to compare our little sorrows to Thy exceedingly great anguish? We, too, have, in this world of ours, to drink from the chalice of calumny. We are sometimes charged with faults, the thought of which never entered our minds. Our most secret thoughts are searched into, in order to discover therein intentions which we never conceived. Our words are misunderstood and their meanings perverted. Our friendships the most pure are given the aspect of base passions. What we do simply and without further thought we are said to do maliciously and shrewdly. We are the victims of envy. Let us endure these trials with patience, and, like Christ, let us know how to hold our peace. Let us calmly undergo slights, disparagement, contempt and insult. In comparison with what Christ underwent, what is all this but the shadow of His

divine sufferings? Still He held His peace. Now, we too, have judges, the natural protectors and supporters of our rights. Their is either a father, a mother, a husband, a dear friend, whose esteem we hold deeper in our hearts than all else. Do these judge us well at all times? How often they even do not afford us any help, any succor! They believe the sayings of our enemies, slight us, condemn us, and even treat us with contempt. How often we have had to say, like David: "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it; and if he that hated me, had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him; but thou, a man of one mind, my guide, my familiar who didst take sweetmeats together with me . . . !" And, as on the lips of David, these sorrowful words have been interrupted by the sobbings of our hearts.

Let us hold our peace. I had been good to men, I had devoted myself to them. Now that I suffer, where are they? They have fled away. Who knows? Perhaps they have betrayed and sold me. I had loved, I had put all my heart in that love, I was living only for the one I loved. Day and night my thoughts were of him, and my work, my honor, my happiness, my life, my all were devoted to him. Where are those I loved! They have left me, along the way, as a broken vessel, the burden of which each thinks too heavy, and I am forsaken and alone.

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Personally Jesus was innocent. Although He had taken on Himself the sins of all mankind, these sins could not be laid to His charge by Pilate. Before His judge and accusers, He stood spotless and blameless. But as for us, who complain of being accused, of being forsaken, are we like Him guiltless? Yes, perhaps we are guiltless of the charge that is against us; but for how many sins should we not have to blush, if they were not hidden in the inmost recesses of our hearts! Is there any man who would willingly appear before the world, exactly as he sees himself, in the solitude of his conscience, with all his hidden deeds, desires, regrets, thoughts and passions?

We should be judged, then, according to our deserts; and we grieve now, because some faults of ours, only one of our many faults, has been discovered and judged. Ah! if everything were known! Let us

hold our peace, and under the condemnations of the world, let us bow our heads with patience, for *juste patimur* - "we suffer justly;" we richly deserve it. Jesus allowed Himself to be condemned; He endured all. Guiltless, He wished to expiate our faults: guilty, let us unite our expiation to His and let us commence by undergoing the sentence, like Him, without recrimination. Like Him, let us endure the desertion of our friends, the accusations of our enemies, their disdain, their betrayal; let us take this burden on our shoulders; for what is it in comparison with the burden, which is to be put upon Jesus!

Meditation 2 - Jesus is Laden with His Cross



Everything is ready: the cross is finished, the Roman soldiers are armed. Proceed to Calvary. The multitude starts; children run, sing and cheer; they wish to see how a man suffers capital punishment. The chief priests and ancients of the people then follow, concealing under a serious exterior the secret joy of their souls. O ye, who cover with the veil of the divine name your bloody hatred, who justify, under the pretext of keeping the law and the prophets, your ignominious revenge, what did Christ commit against you?

And now comes the crowd which does not know what they do, the crowd which was paid, the crowd which spits upon Christ and embraces Barabbas. Christ, Thy time has come, go on! Soldiers hold the cross erect before putting it on His divine shoulder; it is upright, its black shadow can be contemplated. Suddenly, Jesus, as if aroused from a deep thought, sees it; His eyes beam, His lips smile, He opens His arms to it, He accepts it, He takes it upon His shoulder and He goes on. He goes to Calvary, He goes to death. The crowd shouts continually. Above this shouting is heard, now and then, the confused and dull noise of the mob uttering vulgar jokes, abjectly ridiculing Jesus. They eagerly push forward, jostling one another to feast their eyes on the suffering Saviour. These Jews, always ready to revolt against the Roman authority, these Jews trembling at the remembrance of the law and their fatherland, these Jews so anxious

to shake off the Roman yoke, these Jews so full of hate against Caesar, now cheer Caesar's soldiers, because they are to execute a Jew charged with preaching revolt against Caesar. In order to obtain the blood of Christ, they have suddenly become Caesar's most loyal subjects!

Jesus proceeds in silence on His way amid a shower of base insults and outrages. But what a lesson the Master is giving us! Let us take it now.

* * *

Suffering is our cross. How do we act when it is upon us? When it is yet far off, threatening us, and even long before it reaches us, we are distressed; we anticipate our sorrow, and thus add to its weight. Our imagination, straying away, supplies us with false pretexts of sorrow. How often have we shed tears for evils which never reached us! Vain and childish tears! Did Christ fear the gibbet, while the executioners were felling the tree, while they were making the cross, or when they were bringing it to place it on His shoulder? No; His thoughts, calm and resigned, were dwelling with love upon the Providence of His Father. Let us not anticipate or worry about the future, is not the present heavy enough? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." The future belongs to God; He alone knows what it has in store for us. Whatever happens, happens because God wills or permits it. Let us rest in the arms of Divine Providence, placing our heart upon His heart, and let us draw close to Him, "like chickens under the wings" of the hen. Now when the cross is offered to Jesus, how gladly He welcomes it! And we, what do we do? We close our eyes so as not to see our cross, we turn our heads aside, we flee from it; but it follows us, it reaches us, and we stumble and fall under its weight. Let us be strong. Sorrowful as life may be, God proportions suffering according to our strength. Let us not exaggerate our pain, in order to excuse our weakness. Let us look straight at the cross, as it stands erect before us, remembering that everything here below, even sorrow and suffering, live but one day.

Meditation 3 - Jesus Falls the First Time



Under the weight of the cross, Jesus proceeds on His way. From the moment when, at Gethsemane, the soldiers led by Judas? had arrested Him, and even since the Last Supper, He had tasted neither food nor drink. Restless and in many ways tormented, He had spent a terrible night; He had undergone the examination before Annas, been led away to Caiphas, and in the morning to Pilate; Pilate had sent Him to Herod. Sent back to Pilate, He had been most cruelly scourged, buffeted, and crowned with thorns. Finally with blood flowing from His fair head, He had taken up the cross. But very soon, notwithstanding His courage, He becomes weak: His breast heaves, His feet, a long time controlled by His will, stronger than His sorrow, falter at last; He trembles, His knees bend, He totters, He falls to the ground with the cross upon Him.

Then there is a stir in the mob: they fear their victim will escape crucifixion. Seeing, however, that Christ is still living, they feel relieved and again begin to outrage Him. Roughly the soldiers raise Him, and, devoid of pity, they again place the cross on His shoulder and push Him forward. Jesus, weak, pale, and bleeding goes on.

To take up our cross valiantly, to accept sorrow when God offers us its bitter chalice, is the part of a great soul. 'Tis the first step toward Calvary, the way all Christian souls must go, painful as it may be. The excitement of the first hour, the enthusiasm always inspired by a great cause, the consciousness of doing something great and noble, naturally serve as incentives to be heroic enough to accept our trials. At first glance, there are few human hearts which are not ready to become martyrs. But there is something more difficult and painful than a short martyrdom; and that is a protracted and permanent sorrow. When our transient enthusiasm has vanished, when we are face to face, as it were, with our persistent cross, how weak are we not! To suffer but one day or two, is endurable; but to suffer for weeks, months, years, always the same pain, the same anguish, is too much for our frail will; we soon fall exhausted.

Question that poor soul wounded and fallen, and she will answer with tears: "'Tis too much suffering; why does not God let me die; yes, it would be better for me to die." May God prevent me from rebuking any one on account of this weakness of will, since Christ Himself fell to encourage us; . . . but it was neither the will of the Master, nor His heart that gave way; His body alone became exhausted. As for us, on the contrary, both our body and our soul fall, and even our will, our energy weaken and give way. O my Divine Master, how well Thou understandest our poor hearts! Thou knowest how weak we are; Thou knowest that our strength is only as a transitory glimmer which shines today and fades tomorrow; consequently, Thou doest not wonder to see us so weak, and our falls do not turn Thee away from us. Thou hast had pity on us, Thou hast fallen like us. But, Jesus, Thou didst rise immediately! As for us, do we rise again? Are we to remain prostrate in the dust, without trying to rise and start again? Oh human soul, arise, try again, take thy cross as Christ took his and proceed on thy way.

Meditation 4 - Jesus Meets His Mother



The disciples tried indeed to conceal from Mary the frightful sufferings of her divine Son; but ere long, warned by the shouts and clamor of the mob, which resounded afar, she learned all. She hastens to meet him; she yearns to see her Son. Love helps her faltering steps, though anguish breaks her heart. Through the streets of Jerusalem she hurries, and suddenly she beholds Him before her, pale, bleeding, bent under the burden of the cross - the cross which crushes Him.

O Mother, this is thy own loved Son!

A smothered cry of supreme anguish escapes from the lips of the Virgin; neither the crowd, nor the soldiers can stop her; and sobbing, placing her arms around the neck of her son, she embraces Him; "*Nec potuit dicere verbum*," says Saint Boniface, "She is unable to utter a word." She does not speak, she silently weeps; and from the lips of Christ, no more than from the lips of Mary, tradition does not relate any utterance. A mother and her child need not words to understand each other! Their tears alone speak, their sorrowful tears, the blood of their soul.

O Mary, Mother, behold thy Son, the Beloved of thy heart; thy Son Jesus, so beautiful, whom thou so often didst fondle upon thy knees, whom thou didst so lovingly caress, this Jesus whom thou didst conceal in Egypt, fleeing from the jealousy of Herod; this Jesus who, after living thirty years under thy maternal care, had left

thee to go to teach and save His people. Behold what His people have done to Him. Oh! Virgin, leave Him no more, leave Him not, for He is about to die in excruciating sufferings and shame.

There is in a mother's look something authoritative that commands respect, and at first makes the crowd and the soldiers instinctively fall back. But soon, their nobler feelings yield to baser passions. They violently wrest Jesus from Mary. The escort, momentarily stopped, starts again and goes on. Mary, now among the crowd, steadily watches and follows Jesus. Jesus proceeds on His way, seemingly stronger and as if reanimated by His Mother. At least one loving heart accompanies Him on the road to martyrdom. He is not left alone to suffer.

O Lord, I thank Thee for having allowed that the first mark of love which was bestowed on Thee along that sorrowful way should proceed from a mother's heart. O the love of a mother! What love can compare with it! It deserved to move and comfort Thee before any other.

Let us now see the reason of this first consolation which comes to Jesus. Let us take the lesson of the Master in its natural import. You suffer, my child; go then to your mother, and there in her arms your tears shall be dried. What need of such an advice? The bleeding heart rushes instinctively to the heart of a mother. And when a mother sees her child suffering, her voice becomes sweeter, her love grows warmer, her caresses are softer, more tender and more soothing. How well do we not then perceive that mother and child are as one, for is not the child the flesh of her flesh, the blood of her blood, the life of her life? Behold Monica and Augustine on the seashore where the ocean wave comes to spend itself. But why recall Monica and Augustine? Has not every one of us had a mother? Do we forget how she loved us? Have we not seen her eyes and her loving smile; have we not heard her soft voice, have we not felt her caresses upon our cheeks, her kisses upon our lips? Who does not know, that in a mother's heart is the true refuge of our souls?

But alas! Although we may not have yet lived many years, there remains for most of us only the remembrance of this unspeakable love! To be near our mother, we have to go to the cemetery, and

even there what do we find? Inert dust, which can neither speak nor hear. It is the only visible thing that remains of the one who bore us so great and so tender a love.

Though our loving mother be dead, she yet lives; she sees us, she listens to us, she loves us yet, and through the mysterious veil which separates this world from heaven, she surrounds us with her comforting tenderness. Why do we not go to her? Why do we not speak to her? Why do we not show her our hearts when bruised with sorrow?

But this is not all: on Calvary, where Christ is now going to die for us, another Mother shall be given to us The Queen of sorrows will become our Mother. She also will have pity on us and will comfort us, and this far more lovingly and effectively than our own natural mother, for: *Nemo tam mater*, "No one is so truly a mother as she."

Meditation 5 - Simon the Cyrenean



Christ continues to carry his cross, but it becomes evident, even to His executioners, that He will not be able to go thus all the way which still separates Him from Calvary. A Cyrenean happening to pass by, not aware of the drama which is to be enacted, comes nearer, curious to ascertain the object of such a crowd of Jews. The soldiers summon him to help carry the cross. The law gives them this right.

Simon, not knowing Jesus, is indifferent to His cause, bearing Him neither love nor hatred; possibly, he had heard of the Prophet of Nazareth, who had captivated all Judea. If a good feeling incites him to succor Jesus; his heart, however, being kind, he at first sight pitied Him; but his pity soon gives way to the natural discontent one feels when called upon to perform something disagreeable and humiliating. Still he cannot escape, he has to submit, he obeys; so he takes upon his shoulder the end of the cross and carries it with Jesus.

Jesus is relieved. . . . the cross is not less heavy, but He has to drag it no more with that strain which bruised Him and enlarged His bleeding wounds on account of the roughness of the road. He was not offended at the indifference of Simon, but rewarded him for the good he did by calling him to the light of faith.

This indifferent Simon, this unknown man, without love, without hatred, who nevertheless comforts and succors our sorrow, do we not also meet him along our way? Yes. I see him present in those events, in those circumstances which are prepared by God far from us, which are realized independently of our will and which, without removing our sorrow, gives as it were a new course to our lives, shedding a drop of joy or at least of comfort in it.

Usually we cannot hold anybody responsible for our suffering: general causes which govern the world, by following laws almost fatal, without directly aiming at us, reach and strike us; a mortal plague passes over our heads; among thousands it attacks our bodies and throws us upon a bed of pain, a prey to disease and possibly to death. Who is responsible for this? An industrial or commercial crisis strikes a whole land; by laws as fatal as the laws of nature, it precipitates me into ruin. Who is guilty? A mother cries over the grave of her child, a husband over the grave of his wife, a child over that of its mother; is not death one of the general laws of mankind? Therefore, upon whom must we lay the blame?

Even when our sorrows come from the free will of others, their free will is not always so perverted and so malicious as we should at first be led to imagine; for did they really intend the evil they did? Were they not weaker than wicked? Do they not themselves regret the evil which they did not foresee? And just as these circumstances, these persons are for us a cause of suffering, without their will or knowledge, also, without knowing it, without willing it, other events, other persons comfort and console us.

It is indeed a very strange coincidence, that at the first shock, suffering always appears to us unbearable. We do not see how, under such a stroke, we shall be able to live; it seems that we must succumb and die. Time goes on, and yet we do not die! And if, after several months of sorrowful life, after one year, two or more years, we ask ourselves, how it has been possible that we could have borne the trial, we perceive that certain fortuitous events and circumstances, which came as a ray of light during a night which we thought was to be endless, as a ray of hope in our souls, which seemed forever closed to happiness. Here are our Cyreneans, and we are wrong not to trust in them.

Neither our happiness, nor our unhappiness ever reaches the measure we had foreseen; nothing happens, neither so good, nor so bad as we had imagined; however sad or joyful we fancy the future, we always greatly magnify it.

But, why speak of fortuitous events, fatal circumstances, blind laws? Is this the language of a Christian? No, no, no. It is God we should see in every occurrence, our own God, our loving Father. It is He who disposes all things around us, it is He who weaves all the web of our lives, it is He who mingles in it cheer and sorrow, tears and smiles, sadness and comfort. Rough as is the way on which we walk, it is He who traced it; He made it for our feet, He fixed it according to our strength and courage. He loves us, and it is His love, His love only which is the providence of our lives.

Meditation 6 - Veronica



The example of Mary following her Son encouraged other hearts. Women soon accompanied her, weeping and sympathizing with her. Jesus by that time was indeed a very pitiful sight. Bent under His cross, pale and exhausted, He staggers as He walks along, big drops of sweat mingle with the blood upon His sacred face. The Jews insult Him, the soldiers use Him roughly; as a lamb led to the slaughter, He utters no complaint. Beholding such a sorrow, witnessing such outrages, at the sight of His divine face bleeding, a woman's heart is moved; she forces her way through the soldiers, kneels before Jesus, and presents Him with a towel. Tradition relates that when He returned it, His countenance was impressed upon it. The woman's name being unknown, she has been called, in remembrance of this, Veronica, that is to say, the true image.

It is the second mark of affection which Christ receives and welcomes; the first came from His Mother, the second from a friend. Does it not point out to us the two first sources of consolation, with which we can refresh our souls: the family and friendship?

Holy Writ calls friendship "the remedy of life." It gives us in the friendship of David and Jonathan a most attractive and tender picture. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." But how rare among men is this holy and delightful friendship! How often self-interest, selfishness, caprice, and passion are concealed under its name!

If God, in His goodness, has put along your way a friend, faithful and true, Oh! bless Him, realize the price of this great gift! Open to your friend your suffering, disconsolate heart; you need but show him your suffering, and he will bring comfort to your soul.

True enough, neither the love of Mary, nor the friendship of Veronica, took off the cross of Jesus. It still remained, bruising His shoulder, but at least they soothed His heart. So will your friends do likewise; their friendship will not end your sorrow, for you shall continue to wear it still burning in your heart; but they will soften its bitterness. Their words will be like balm in your sore wounds. Therefore taste the sweetness of friendship, since God Himself gives us the example; let us accustom our souls to the joy of loving, since He has empowered friendship to alleviate the evils of life.

But, alas! do not our friends often abandon us? Do they not often leave us, forget us? Do they not die? To see them forgetful of us, forsaking us, or dying, one by one, and alone to survive them, constitutes one of life's greatest miseries.

Listen to David weeping over Jonathan: "The illustrious of Israel are slain upon thy mountains: how are the valiant fallen? Tell it not in Geth, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice. . . . Ye mountains of Gelboe, let neither dew, nor rain come upon you, neither be they fields of first fruit; for there were cast away the shields of the valiant, the shield of Saul. Saul and Jonathan,, lovely and comely in their life, even in death they were not divided: Ye, daughters of Israel, weep over Saul. How are the valiant fallen in battle? Jonathan slain in the high places? I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan, exceeding beautiful and amiable to me above the love of women. How are the valiant fallen?"

Who does not know that death may snatch our friends from us? Who does not mourn in his soul? Shall we be left alone, if human friendship fails to comfort us, in our suffering? No; there is one Friend who dieth not, who day and night expects us and calls us, ready to give Himself to us in an unspeakable love: it is Jesus Christ Himself.

'Tis He who took this name, when giving Himself to us: "I will not

call you servants. . . . I have called you friends." Here, then, is the immortal Friend of our souls. Before taking up the cross which He was to carry to Calvary, He had given to His apostles His own flesh to eat, His very blood to drink, wishing to be one with them. Read and read again in the Gospel the sublime farewell discourse of Christ to those He addresses as His friends: behold what a love! As for us, why do we not go to this Divine Friend? Why do we forget Him when we suffer? Why do we leave Him alone in the tabernacle of His temples? Why?

Meditation 7 - The Second Fall



Notwithstanding Simon's help, and notwithstanding the comfort which Mary and Veronica gave Him, Jesus becomes more and more exhausted; His strength fails again, and as He approaches one of the gates of the city, He falls the second time.

It is a heartrending shock to Mary and Veronica; almost breathless they run to succor Him; but they are repelled by the mob and the soldiers. The executioners roughly raise up Jesus. The march goes on, but it is evident the Divine Saviour can not bear up much longer. Many were already wondering how a man so frail, so exhausted, could so long endure such hardships.

Who can imagine the condition of our Divine Lord at that moment? So many shocks had kept open all His wounds, causing His blood to flow and cover His sacred face. A heart of stone would have been softened; but the hearts of the Jews remained stubborn and hardened; their only fear was lest Christ's death would come too soon; lest He should die on the way instead of on Golgotha, and thus deprive them of the pleasure of witnessing His ignominious death.

The thoughts of Jesus were of His people. He foresaw the future ruin of Jerusalem, the captivity of her children, of this perfidious race, thirsting for His blood. He said: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee,

how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not? Behold your house shall be left to you, desolate. . . . there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed." So it is not on His bodily sufferings that He thinks; He thinks on His people and their further calamities.

* * *

In this second fall there is a twofold teaching for us. Christ, our divine Saviour, shows us that, sweet as are the consolations which come from man to man, they are ineffective. He allows them, since He tasted them Himself, but, immediately after, He shows that we should not rely much upon them; for, after having been, consoled by His mother's love, after having been assisted by Simon, His strength fails and He falls to the ground.

As I have said: friendship, motherly love, human affection soothe our suffering for a little while. They are the oil and the wine poured upon the wounds of the unfortunate traveler by the Samaritan passing by; but here is the sorrow: the Samaritan does not remain, but goes away. Friends do not stay forever, they leave us sooner or later.

How often do we not, like the disciples going to Emmaus insisting on the Lord to remain with them, say to a friend about to leave us in our sorrow: "Stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent." But he stays not, and our hearts go back afar into the night, and, weary and lonely, we fall again into despondency.

Then, with renewed efforts, we rise again, strong and courageous. It is a second triumph, but soon after our energy weakens again, and once more we fall under the cross which crushes us. And then, weary and despondent, we are troubled in our inmost soul, because we are obliged forever to vanquish an enemy that attacks us forever. Is this struggle to continue for all time? Yes, poor soul of mine, during your pilgrimage here below, you have to start again and again on the same sorrowful way. But Jesus is there to give you the example how to do it. He is there to impart to you light and strength. Go then to Him.

Meditation 8 - Jesus Comforts the Women of Jerusalem



Jesus, carrying His cross, has now passed the walls of Jerusalem. Within one hundred steps of the gate, at a place where the ascent to Calvary becomes more steep, He sees weeping women coming to meet Him; some mothers perhaps, whose little children He had caressed; perhaps that widow of Nairn, to whom He had given back her son. He recognizes them, and, seeing their tears, thanks them, and, then opening His heart, with a voice as sweet as it is touching, He says to them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days shall come, wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren and the wombs that have not borne and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us, and to the hills: cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"

It was as an echo of the prophecies He had uttered two days previously: "They that are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains. And, he that is on the housetop, let him not come down to take anything out of his house; woe to them that are with child and that give suck in those days. There shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be."

While Jesus speaks, there is silence, but when He has ceased speaking, the Jews answer by curses and insults.

Later on, a day shall come when another Jesus, the son of Ananus, during the solemnity of the Tabernacles, shall say also: "Woe to the City! Woe to the Temple! Voices from the East, Voices from the West, Voices from the four winds of the earth, woe to Jerusalem!" They will scourge him too, but at every stroke of the lash, he will cry out: "Woe to Jerusalem!" During four years he will continue to do so: on the forum and in the streets, everywhere and at all times he will utter his sorrowful saying. And some days after, Jerusalem and her temple shall disappear in ruins, among the flames of an immense conflagration.

* * *

By thinking only on the sufferings of others, our Divine Saviour teaches us a wonderful means of sweetening the bitterness of our trials. Like Him, let us forget our sorrows in order to relieve those of our neighbor.

When in suffering, we are apt to believe we are the most unhappy of mankind. We feel an almost irresistible inclination to complain that we have more to suffer than the rest of mankind, and that no one else has to suffer as we do; such a thought tends to render our life more burdensome and painful.

However tried we may be, we are not an exception among our fellow-men. Suffering is the lot of all the children of Adam. True enough, God does not dispense to all the same amount or kind of suffering, but no one is free from it. The feelings of all are not equally hurt, but the heart of each one bleeds nevertheless.

Were we more carefully to look around us, we should not be so easily deceived as to the greatness of our trials. A mother, bereft of a darling only child, for instance, sees another mother whom God has allowed to keep all her little ones, and complains bitterly of her loss. Were she to look at a third who had three, four, or five children and who has seen them all snatched away from her, one after the other, at the same age, from the same disease, she would be more resigned to her loss.

A wealthy family, ruined during a financial crisis, thinks of others who escaped all loss and can continue a life of ease and luxury,

while they have now barely the necessities of life. Were they to look at the numberless poor and destitute families, whose life is one of constant privation and misery, who have sometimes not even a piece of dry bread to give their famished little ones, they would surely not so easily complain of their lot.

To think on the poor, is of great benefit to them that suffer. And not only to think on them, to take interest in their miseries, to succor them, to become their friend, to make sacrifices for them, to serve and love them as Jesus did, will ever prove a great source of comfort in our crosses and trials.

Some, perhaps, may not understand how by caring for the poor, by loving, visiting and helping them, we may find sweetness and consolation amid our trials and secret sorrows. But let them try it whenever they are in suffering and affliction, and they will be astonished at the happy results in sweetening life's bitter trials. I appeal to the experience of the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, to all those charitable Christian ladies who devote themselves to the relief of the poverty-stricken and the sick poor. They can tell us how the sight and relief of the miseries they witnessed in the hovels of the poor, of the destitute sick, enabled them to bear their own crosses with resignation and even with gratitude to God for dealing so leniently with them, and even turned their crosses into motives of joy at being able to suffer a little for Christ.

It is well to give alms, but the mere giving is but little. We should come into close contact with the needy; and when we see so many of our fellow-men more sorely tried than we are, and sometimes bearing their heavy trials with such resignation and even cheerfulness, we shall learn how to profit by our own lighter sufferings.

Meditation 9 - Jesus Falls the Third Time



From the Judiciary Gate to the top of the hill of Calvary, there are about two hundred steps. It was after proceeding about half of that distance, that Jesus met the daughters of Jerusalem. A little further on, He grows so weak and faint that, for the third time, His knees tremble and He falls to the ground.

The soldiers roughly raise Him up and place again the cross upon His shoulders, and then He proceeds, rudely pulled and pushed by them, until He reaches the end of His painful journey.

* * *

Why is this third fall of our Divine Saviour? Why should we again recall to our minds the lesson which He has already twice given us? Do we not know that, sinful and weak, we shall fall sometimes, and that it will be necessary for us to rise again? Yes, we know that, but we do not sufficiently realize it. Our conduct shows that we fail to understand this or to act in accordance with our knowledge.

When we enjoy peace and contentment, we reason, indeed, very well about our past trials, and we realize how unwise we were in allowing ourselves to become so despondent on account of them, we make firm resolutions henceforth to bear our sufferings more courageously and cheerfully. But when the sorrowful hours comes, lo! our fervor vanishes like smoke. Our knees waver and we fall to the earth, discouraged and despondent.

The danger and misfortune is not so much that we are weak and fall and commit sin, for all this is only human, since "the just man falls seven times," and Christ plainly shows how He pities us, nor that we yield to a transient discouragement, but that we grow despondent and lose all courage, forgetting that though the just man falls seven times, yet "he rises again. " Now, however humiliating it may be for us to despond, to lack energy and strength, to remain prostrate in our sins, we, nevertheless, feel tempted not to rise from our sins, either because we think: "Of what use is it for me to rise, since I am sure to fall again however much I may try," or because, yielding to slothe, we say to ourselves: "It is too difficult; I cannot overcome this fault." Such apathy, such moral cowardice, such despondency in times of trial is often seen and often even causes the death of the soul. Such a soul is powerless for good. It has no energy, no zeal for salvation. Let us never yield to despondency. Let us struggle until the last moment, let us rise again and as often as we fall, after the example of our Lord.

Meditation 10 - Jesus Drenched with Gall and Stripped of His Clothes



At last the goal of the painful journey is reached. The executioners take the cross from off the shoulder of Christ and they make the last preparations for the crucifixion. The mob now press around as near as they can the Victim and His executioners. Among the crowd I see Mary heart-broken, yet strong and courageous; Magdalen and a few holy women are with her, and also John the beloved disciple.

While some soldiers dig the hole where the cross is to be placed, and others prepare the hammers and the nails, two of them strip Christ Jesus, they take off His mantle and other clothing, then the coat without seam which the hands of Mary had spun and woven for Him. These clothes the soldiers divided among themselves, and they cast lots for the coat without seam.

And Jesus standing, thus stripped before all, looking up to heaven, becomes an object of shame and derision, shrouded only by the blood pouring out of His re-opened wounds, and His head crowned with thorns. Behold Christ! Behold the Lord and Sovereign of the universe! He is the poorest man, for He has nothing that He can call His own!

What worldly riches did He possess?

Gold? He lived on alms, and even these Judas stole from Him. A

dwelling? For years previously He could say that He had not even a stone whereon to lay His head. Glory? He is about to die between two thieves. Honors? They slandered Him, saying He was a political conspirator, a drunkard, a madman, and preferring even Barabbas to Him. As to the disciples and followers, where are they? They have fled and are concealed. They did not hide themselves when their Master entered Jerusalem in triumph! But today what is left to him? There remain to Him Mary, His Mother, Mary of Magdala, and John, and a few holy souls. O my God, I thank Thee for having kept for Thy divine Son at least one treasure, tender and sweet. Tell me, reader, why, in spite of the law, did the Roman soldiers allow Mary, Magdalen and John to stand at the foot of the cross, unless it was because Christ wished to bestow on them His last look.

The Romans were wont, before inflicting capital punishment, to offer to those to be executed a mixture of wine and myrrh, the effect of which, notwithstanding its bitterness, would be to produce stupor in the condemned and render them to some extent insensible to pain. The executioners therefore offered a similar beverage to our Lord. He tasted it in order to suffer from its bitterness, but would not drink it, for He wished to feel all the intensity of the pains of His cruel death. By so acting He intended to show us that we should not seek relief from pain in remedies that deprive us of our senses. He thus condemns our too great eagerness to get rid of all bodily suffering as well as the inordinate use of remedies to destroy pain.

Now what lessons does Christ teach us by being thus wholly deprived of His garments? In the first place, He wished to undergo every kind of suffering for our sins. "It would be a dire blasphemy," wrote Father Bavignan, "to pretend that there exists in the world a pain, a trial, a torment which Jesus did not assume on His bleeding shoulders."

We do not understand this absolute despoliation, because our misery never extends to such a depth; we do not understand it, because Providence, even when striking us, does not reduce us to extreme misery.

But we are not alone in the world. There are some poor who have hardly even more rags of clothing to wear, and who, to cover their nakedness at least in part, have to beg from door to door what we

deem no longer fit to wear. There are fathers and mothers of families who, in spite of the hardest toil, cannot earn enough to procure the most indispensable clothing for their children. There are parents who, when their boys and girls are about to make their first holy Communion, to receive Christ Jesus who as lovingly calls the poorest as the children of the wealthy, who are pained to the heart, because they are too poor to provide their darling children with decent clothing for the day when they are for the first time to have the ineffable happiness to receive their God into their hearts.

What! you do not know this? You do not know that in the slums of our great cities, there are men, women, and children who are famishing for want of sufficient nourishment? And do you believe that Christ forgets them, His poor, that He pays no heed to their sufferings, and that He has not an example and a comfort to give them?

This is the reason why He stands on Calvary stripped of His garments, poorer than the poorest! He undergoes this shame, this privation for the sake of the poor, His beloved poor, whom He made His brethren, for, do not forget this, ye that are wealthy, it was not among you that He chose to be born, it was among them. Whoever does not love the poor and the humble of this world, does not understand the spirit and love of Jesus Christ.

Meditation 11 - Jesus is Nailed to the Cross



The Evangelists relate that greatest and most important of events, our Lord's Crucifixion, in the fewest words possible, simply saying: "They crucified Him." According to the common view of painters and sculptors, the cross was laying on the ground when our Saviour was nailed to it, and afterwards it was raised and planted in the hole previously dug. This view, so graphically placed before the eyes of the faithful, has, little by little, become the common belief. Still it is not likely the correct view.

The Romans were not wont to crucify in such a way. At first the cross was erected. Then the sentenced man, stripped of his clothes, was brought to its foot; a rope was passed under his arms, the ends of which were thrown about the lateral bars of the cross, and he was raised up to a convenient height. Ladders were then set against the cross. The executioners ascended them, extended the arms of the victim one after the other, and bound them to the wood; then they nailed him with large nails by the feet and the hands.

If the Roman soldiers, charged with the execution of Christ, had deviated from custom, very likely the Evangelists would have made note of it.

Here, therefore, is what happens to Jesus. They tie the rope about His body and raise Him in front of the cross; ropes, cutting into His flesh, bind His arms and legs to the cross, and then large nails,

driven through His hands and feet with a hammer, fix and secure Him to the cross.

All this is done in the presence of His Mother!

The Jews cheer, rejoicing at the sight of the blood that flows, of the flesh that palpitates, and of the tears of His weeping Mother, for their hatred is now satisfied. Listen to how they insult and revile Him.

"Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God and in three days dost rebuilt it: save Thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." And at every one of these outrages the mob answers with coarse and vulgar jests.

The Roman soldiers also laugh and join in reviling Him. Even one of the thieves, crucified with Him, amid His own tortures, loads Him with abuse and derision.

Jesus lets His head fall upon His chest; His eyes half opened are resting on Mary, John, and Magdalen. To the outrages and insults of the crowd He makes no reply; but raising His eyes toward heaven, He opens His lips, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

* * *

Why is the shedding of all His blood? Why did Jesus undergo so many tortures, allowing His body to be scourged. His forehead to be encircled with a crown of thorns, His hands and feet to be pierced and torn? Why did Christ allow this? He wished to set an example to the martyrs; He wished to bear Himself all the bodily pains which He was to call thousands of His faithful to suffer.

Time has placed the martyrs a great distance from us; so many centuries have passed over the Colosseum and the catacombs, that we forget what it then cost to remain faithful to Christ. We forget that other martyrs have followed, at each epoch of Christianity, that every age has seen its own, that even our own age, the twentieth

century, has seen many, and that the Passion of Christ has served as the model to all of them.

Christ Jesus is not on the cross merely as our teacher. Do you not see that Mother, enduring in her heart, without fainting, the tortures and insults inflicted on her Son? The body of Jesus is not the only thing which is torn by the executioners' instruments: the heart of Mary is rent by every stroke, every wound, every drop of blood, for is not this agonizing Victim her own Son?

It was necessary that it should be so, for Mary was destined to be an example to mothers who would have to witness the martyrdom of their sons, and even to encourage them to suffer for Christ. Christ and His Blessed Mother were to be an example and a model to all who, in the course of ages, would have sufferings and trials to endure.

And now Christ says to us: "Come and see whether there be a sorrow like unto My sorrow." And you worldlings complain of a little pain, and get discouraged at some slight trial, and murmur on account of it against God who deals so mercifully with you! You even ask why He sends you so much suffering, saying: "What have I done that God should treat me thus?"

Did Christ deserve His suffering? What crime had He committed to be thus so cruelly and so shamefully treated.

"He suffered," says the Gospel, "and so entered into His glory." This is why you also suffer, why you must suffer - that through suffering and tribulation you may reach eternal happiness and glory!

My God, what are the goods of this world, that we grieve so much when we lose them! What is there in the pleasures of this earth, that our hearts should suffer so cruelly when we are deprived of them? Are they not all vain and transitory? Has any of them ever satisfied my heart? And yet, when Thou requirest us to sacrifice any of them, however insignificant, that we may thereby purchase heavenly bliss, we hesitate, and grieve, and murmur, as if Thou demandest too much of us! Ah! if we could, once for all, only understand what this earth is, and what is heaven, this short life here below and the eternal life beyond the grave; if we could but

realize how a little suffering in this life may secure never-ending happiness in heaven, how soon we would cease complaining, and how we would bless and love our sufferings.

Meditation 12 - The Death of Christ



Jesus hangs upon the cross, His blood oozing drop by drop from His sacred body and His life slowly ebbing away. The Jews rejoice at this sight. Mary standing by, does not take her eyes off from her divine Son. John near her is also overwhelmed with sorrow; Magdalen, kneeling, with both arms clasping the tree of the cross, imprints kisses on the torn feet of her divine Master. Since noon the sky has been growing darker and darker, and a livid and sinister obscurity spreads over the whole earth. Jesus feels that His hour is come. "Mother," He says to Mary with unspeakable tenderness, "Mother, behold thy son;" and turning His eyes to John the beloved disciple, He says: "Behold thy mother."

And, as if wishing to express the intense desolation He experiences in His soul at being so forsaken. He exclaims: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Then alluding to His having fulfilled all the prophecies, He cries out: "It is consummated!" And finally He adds: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit;" then, bowing His head, He dies.

Suddenly in the temple the veil of the sanctuary is rent in twain. The earth quakes, as if it was about to perish: the rocks are split, and the graves are opened, and many bodies of the saints that had slept, arise.

"Truly," cries the centurion in command of the soldiers, "this was the Son of God;" and he strikes his breast. His soldiers imitate him;

then the Jews, having satisfied their hatred, depart; the mob scatters little by little, trying in vain to conceal their fear at the sight of terrible events taking place. Mary, John, and Magdalen remain near the cross. Soon Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, the mother of John, join them and grieve with them near the cross on which their Lord's lifeless body hangs.

* * *

The Son of God underwent death; and so must we. Our death is perhaps not far off; perhaps we have already its germ within ourselves; perhaps our foreheads are already marked with its seal.

To die! I must die! These words grate harshly in our ears! Nevertheless we must die. "Man's days are as grass; as the flower of the field, so shall he flourish."

Whence comes this dread which death inspires? In this world we live especially by our senses, it is through them that our desires wake up within us. So during our whole life, however innocent it may be, our minds are full of thoughts of material and corporal objects; these only do we perceive, these only do we love. Now death steps in, roughly tears us from this world of the senses, and separates us from it forever. Is it any wonder, if we find death cruel!

But why do we allow ourselves to become so attached to things transitory? Do we not know we are to leave them some day? God has placed the seal of death upon every creature. He wishes all of them to serve as a warning of the brevity of life. Before us flowers fade, fruits fall, trees die, light gives way to darkness. The singing of birds which so charms us, dies away in the echoes of the woods, and is no more. Even those immense rocks, seemingly destined to outlast ages, in the course of time crumble, and by and by become dust. And within ourselves how many things die!

Our present act escapes us the very moment we perform it. How often we would like to grasp it as it flies away, to improve it, but already. . . it is gone. Time, that mysterious image of life, what else is it but a series of points in duration; one moment dies while the other arises. Our thoughts go, our wills vanish, our affections die one after the other. Every thing in nature cries out to us: "I must

die." Is there anything permanent and immutable in this world! And we who naturally feel the need of the endless and unchangeable, how should we attach our hearts to what is vain and transitory, since they are made to enjoy the infinite! This is not all: we who are soon to die, we attach ourselves to the world that we are soon to leave. How foolish!

Even if everything were endless around us, would it not be enough to know that we must die, in order not to expose ourselves to the anguish of an imminent and fatal separation?

No! It is when death is near, when deep wrinkles furrow our faces, when our hair turns gray, when our bodies grow stiff and feeble, it is then that we cling with a delirious energy to the vain loves of this earth! Whose fault is it, if the very thought of death proves unendurable to us and causes us fear and pain?

Meditation 13 - Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross



The sabbath hour is near at hand. According to the Jewish law the bodies of the executed should not remain on the crosses during the holy day. The priests, therefore, go to Pilate, asking him to direct the breaking of the bones of the three crucified, in order to hasten their death, that they may be taken down from the crosses before sunset. The order is issued: soldiers with iron bars break the bones of the limbs of the two thieves: but, as they are about to do the same to Jesus, they perceive that He is already dead, and they pass by. One of them, less sure, in order to remove any doubt, thrusts his spear into Jesus' breast and transpierces His heart; from the wound blood and water come forth.

And all this is done in Mary's presence!

Now, according to the Jewish custom, the bodies of the executed were thrown into a common grave, where they were to remain uncovered, until the flesh would be consumed. After this their relatives were allowed to take their bones and bury them in the family tomb.

Joseph of Arimathea, counsellor of the Sanhedrin, would not suffer this sad lot to befall his divine Master. He had long been a secret disciple of Jesus, but for fear of the Jews, he had concealed it. In the Sanhedrin he had not had the courage to protect the Innocent; but now that Jesus was dead, his love for Him inspired him with

greater courage and strength. He went to Pilate and fearlessly asked for the body of Jesus. This Pilate readily granted, and Joseph went to Calvary.

There, helped by some disciples who, after the crowd had gone away, had come near the cross of Jesus, he slowly takes Jesus down from the cross. At the foot of the gibbet Mary is seated and opens her arms to receive the bleeding, torn, livid, cold and lifeless body of her beloved Son.

* * *

O Mary, dost thou remember the day when in the stable of Bethlehem, God gave thee that Son so charming and lovely, how on thy knees, in thy arms, He smiled in response to thy respectful caresses? Behold what sinners have done to Him and in what a fearful condition He is given back to thee.

What a sea of tears and sorrows,
Did the soul of Mary toss;
To and fro upon its billows,
While she wept her bitter loss;
In her arms her Jesus holding,
Torn but newly from the cross.

Oh, that mournful Virgin Mother,
See her tears, how fast they flow
Down upon His mangled body,
Wounded side and thorny brow:
While His hands and feet she kisses -
Picture of immortal woe.

Oft and oft His arms and bosom
Fondly straining to her own;
Oft her pallid lips imprinting
On each wound of her dear Son
Till at last, in throes of anguish,
Consciousness is all but gone.

Gentle Mother, we beseech thee,
By thy tears and trouble sore;

By the death of thy dear offspring,
By the bloody wounds He bore;
Touch our hearts with that true sorrow
Which afflicted thee of yore.

I have just transcribed the hymn of the feast of the Seven Sorrows. Indeed, there is not a mother who, having seen one of her children die, does not understand it.

When a mother sees her child die, she doubts that he is dead. As she looks at him, it seems that he will breathe again. But when she touches him, and feels the little frame cold, when every illusion is dispelled, when she cannot doubt any more, when she, too, has to say: "He is dead, my son is dead," what words can tell of the anguish of her soul! Still mothers do not usually die of grief. They would like to, but they have to live and suffer, and so they go on, many years perhaps, bearing in their heart a wound which shall never be healed!

Unfortunate mothers, behold Mary! See if your sorrow bears any comparison to hers. When you grieve, go and weep near her! She suffered like you, nay, far more than you; she will understand you so well! So well that she will, as it were, whisper to your heart words of strength and comfort. Go to her: she is a mother like you; like you she has seen her Son die, her only Son, whom she loved with the most intense natural love, whom she loved as her God, with a love surpassing that of the very Seraphim in heaven.

Meditation 14 - Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb



The disciples, taking from Mary the body of Jesus, bring it down Mount Calvary. The Blessed Mother, Magdalen, and the other women silently follow them. The divine body is put upon a large stone. Gently and respectfully they wash from it the crimson blood. Then they pour upon it a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight which Joseph had brought. They wrap the body in a shroud, and according to the custom of the Jews they wrap it in fine linen cloths. Very likely it was Magdalen who watched over this sorrowful burial, for we shall see her, as soon after the Sabbath is over, hastening back to the sepulchre, in order to finish this work, which on account of the lateness of the hour, had been interrupted. Near by, in the rock, is the tomb hewn out for himself by Joseph of Arimathea. The body of Jesus is brought there. Mary gives it the last kiss; it is placed in the sepulchre, and then a large stone is rolled to close its opening. All is now over.

However, neither Mary, nor the group of holy women leave the place where rests the body of the divine Beloved. Saint Matthew relates that "They were sitting over against the sepulchre." But at the setting of the sun, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, they all withdrew.

The Blessed Mother, now henceforth alone, and Magdalen proceed slowly toward the city; on the way they see on the ground in many places the blood which Jesus had there shed.

When death separates us from those we love, it seems that, at first, we cannot realize the extent of our loss, for we are, as it were, dazed by the stroke. A certain length of time is necessary to enable us to measure the void left in our midst by the death of the loved one. But the hour comes when we are sure to realize our loss to its full extent. When the corpse has been borne from the house, when the coffin has been lowered into the grave, when the shovelfuls of earth are falling one after the other upon it, and we see how final the separation is, then, like a flash of lightning, a transport of grief suddenly seizes us, almost capable of depriving us of life.

A similar effect may be produced also, when we lose a person or a thing to which we are devotedly attached.

When a very dear friend foresakes us, we remain long in doubt, hesitating in anguish between hope and fear and fear and hope; but an hour comes when the treason of the one who once loved us, appears clearly evident to us, who but a short time before, were blind to his evil deed; but now we are done with him, done with him forever.

Or through some misfortune we lose all we have, and behold dire poverty staring us in the face, but we do not feel it yet; there is still some light in our sky. But some day we stand in some great need, and have not wherewith to procure it; and now we realize what poverty really is!

While a man has yet a gleam of hope, he can, if he has the will, find the way again; but when all hope is gone, when all is lost, when all is finished! When we feel, like Mary, our loneliness in the dark and silent night, we are reduced to the lowest depths of despondency.

Poor souls that feel thus, why deceive yourselves? Nothing is ever irretrievably lost, nothing is ever finished, nothing is ever without a remedy, because everything reaches its perfection, everything is found again, everything has its reparation in heaven.

Undoubtedly, if we consider our life as a whole between its two earthly limits, birth and death; that it begins with the one and ends

with the other, then yes, how many things are finished, lost, and irreparable. But this is only one part of our life, the smaller part Do you forget it is to continue beyond this world, throughout an endless eternity?

Why have we not more faith?

Our life is as a book, a page of which we turn here below; death comes very soon to turn the next, but the book does not finish with the page it has touched. Not a word, not a phrase is interrupted, and without any divergence, as the previous page had been opened, the next one opens itself in eternity. We shall never cease to live; not any of our beloved departed have ceased to live; an hour came when they ceased to live here below, an hour shall come when we also shall cease to live here below, but we all enter at once eternity to live therein a new life.

If we would have this ardent faith, we would not concentrate all our thoughts, all our plans, all our resolutions, all our labor, all our endeavors, all our love on this world, where we have no permanent abode. We would do as the travellers who go far away, across the ocean, to find a new land. Do they seek on the vessel they are in a definite resting-place? No, they think on the land they are soon to reach, on the new life they are to spend there. Should we not do the same? Is not this present life a mere crossing of a sea? What should we care about the weariness and the hardships of the voyage, since we are going to our Fatherland! Do we suffer very much when far from those we love, if we are journeying towards them, if every day brings us nearer to them?

What an encouragement and a comfort this thought would be to us! Another advantage would accrue to us therefrom. It would open our eyes oftener to that future and never-ending life, and we would exert ourselves more energetically to insure for us there a happy destiny. For if faith tells us that death introduces us into it, it also tells us that the first step we take there will lead us to the tribunal of our Judge. How shall I appear there, if my hands are empty of virtues and good works? How shall I appear there, if my soul is impure and defiled? How shall I appear there, if I have done nothing for heaven, if I have worked only for this earth and this world which we must so soon leave?

But, if I have loved the good, if I have endeavored to be just, if my heart has remained firm against malice and perversity, if I have followed Christ along the royal road of suffering, how comforting and blessed will be that hour! It will be the end of my sorrow and the beginning of my joy; it will be a passage from exile to Fatherland.

There my beloved ones await me, expect me. There I shall expect those I have left, until the day when God will gather all the souls of good will, to whom He came to announce peace.

This first life is short! Indeed, this life is nothing in comparison with the other. What is it to lose here, for a few hours, the joys which we shall find there immeasurably greater and without end?

Christians, as to the departed for whom you so bitterly grieve, fill your hearts with hopes of their happy lot, as well as for yourselves. If they have suffered here below, if you suffer here below, let me tell you again, have confidence.

Suffering is the great means of expiation, suffering is the mark of divine predestination; it washes us in the blood of our hearts, and our souls so purpled are pleasing to Christ; He recognizes in them the signs by which He was marked when He ascended Calvary to atone for our sins and obtain eternal happiness for us.

About This EBook

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It has the Nihil Obstat of Father Frederick George Holweck, Censor theologicus; and the Imprimatur of Cardinal John Joseph Glennon, Archdiocese of Saint Louis, Missouri, 16 December 1904.

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